July 12, 2015 Don Riley

Ephesians 1: 15-23

Good Morning. It is great to be back with you again. Especially these weeks when we are considering the glory of God, the work of the glory of God, and who he is. I want you to consider

that Paul opens the magnificent letter to the book of Ephesians by listing the blessings we receive from the Father, from the Son, and from the Holy Spirit. At the end of each description of each person of the Trinity, Paul uses glory in his summary praise. Notice verse 6, “To the praise of his glorious grace.” The Father chose us, predestined us, and adopted us. Then in verse 6 “To the praise of His glorious grace.” At the conclusion of the Son’s work in us, redeeming us, forgiving us, and revealing the mystery of the Gospel to us. He summarizes in verse 12 “to the praise of his glory.” At the conclusion of the work of the Holy Spirit in sealing us, he summarizes in verse 14 “to the praise of His glory.” Paul thinks this is a good series to preach on. Father. Son. Holy Spirit. “To the praise of his glorious grace.” “To the praise of His glory.” And again, “To the praise of his glory.”

Now we consider Ephesians 1:15-23 which is the first of two prison prayers in the book of Ephesians. The first one we consider today, the second one, Ephesians 3: 14-21, we will study next week. Paul wrote many of his New Testament books from prison. There were others who made great, positive contributions from prison. John Bunyan in the 17th century spent 12 years in prison and wrote “Pilgrim’s Progress.” Cervantes wrote “Don Quixote” from prison. But on of the most interesting contributions from prison was by William Addis, and 19th century Englishman who invented the toothbrush while he was in prison. Now some people would get down and discouraged and depressed, but he refused “to get down in the mouth”, “by gum.” You may “bristle” at those puns and think negatively but one good thing about being in a dentist chair is things are always looking up! It’s important that you really know me.

Let’s look at this prayer in Ephesians 1:15-23. It is all about knowing the Father of Glory. He begins by saying in verses 15 and 16, “For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to five thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.” Notice: Paul’s prayerful, persistent thanks. He heard of their faith. He heard of their love. He persistently gave thanks! He said I do not cease to give thanks. It’s an attitude of gratitude. What’s down in the well comes up in the bucket. Paul always prayed. He later writes in 1st Thessalonians 5:16-18, “Rejoice always. Pray constantly. Give thanks in all things. For this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” Paul was prayerfully persistent and Paul was prayerfully persistent in his thanksgiving to God. Paul did not thank them for their faith, but rather thanked God for their faith and love. Paul knew faith was vital so he thanked God not for the size of their congregation, not for the size of the church building, not for their full program, but for their faith. Also notice that Paul thanked God for their love toward all the saints. As I have gotten to know you, Woodland, I thank God for your faith, as I have heard you describe your church and describe each other, I thank God for your love. This is a warm, loving family here at Woodland.

In three weeks you will have yet another preacher. Reverend Sandy Willson of Second Presbyterian saw me a few weeks ago and said, “Hey, I heard I am substituting for you!” He certainly elevated me, but he asked me about the preaching series and I added in a text to him that Woodland is a warm, vibrant, worshipful church who love their Lord and each other. I told him that it is a great joy and honor to be at Woodland for which I am deeply thankful. The apostle Paul would also embrace you and likewise thank God for your faith and for your love. He would also pray the following four prayerful, knowing petitions. That you would know the Father of glory. That you would know the hope of the Father of glory. That you would know the riches of the Father of glory. That you would know the power of the Father of glory. Yes, four prayerful, knowing petitions: that you would know, that you would know the hope, that you would know the riches, that you would know the power. Know him, the hope, the riches, the power, all of the Father of glory. This is the only time in the entire New Testament that this name is used. The Father of glory that which Moses longed to see, that which Habakkuk longed to understand, that which the heavens declare, that which is found perfectly depicted in Jesus and fulfilled in Jesus, the Father of glory.

We read in Hebrews 12 God is called the “Father of spirits.” We read of God in James 1 as the “Father of lights.” We read in Isaiah 9 of God as “Father of eternity.” Here in Ephesians, we hear the Holy Spirit inspire Paul to pen from prison that he is the Father of glory. D. Martin Lloyd Jones says in his commentary that, “Glory is the summation of all the excellencies and perfections and attributes of the Lord God Almighty Himself.” When Stephen was on trial before the Sanhedrin in Acts 7, he reminded them of the history of Israel and said, “The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham.” Everything God does is a manifestation of his glory. Paul wrote to Rome in chapter 6 verse 4 and said, “Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father.” Jesus himself commenting on the 2nd coming said,”The Son of Man shall come in the glory of the Father with his angels” (Matt. 16:27). Paul wants us to know this Father of glory.

Paul said of his own spiritual journey, “That I might know him, and the power of his resurrection and may share in his suffering.” Paul prays more about spiritual characteristics than for physical needs. He prays that they would know the Father of glory. That they would know through the Holy Spirit of wisdom and revelation. What we believe about God defines what kind of people we are. The atheist claims there is no God for us to know, and the agnostic states that if there is a God, we cannot know him. Therefore the atheist has no religious holiday and the agnostic lacks knowledge. The study of God, theology, is called the queen of sciences. We can know God. To know God personally is salvation. To know God increasingly is sanctification. To know God perfectly is glorification.

Many of you are following the emerging candidates for the presidency. You hear what they say, on different sides, so many to choose from. It is hearing them, listening to them. Several years ago as a seminarian, I realized that due to being weaned on the Westminster Confession of Faith as a child, and reading the Bible that the Reformed approach was the best system of Biblical thinking. Therefore I wanted to know John Calvin. Why? Because Martin Luther and John Calvin started the Reformation. Here is the history of the Church, the first 1500 years, in 3 sentences. The church was formed. The church was deformed. The church was reformed. Martin Luther started the Reformation in Germany but John Calvin, the French lawyer turned theologian, spread Reformational thinking throughout all of Europe. To know John Calvin, I read definitive biographies on John Calvin. But to really know him, I read what he wrote. “The Institute of the Christian Religion” is probably the greatest writing on theology second only to the Bible. If you’ve never read Calvin’s Institutes, I highly recommend you get the two volume series. It is probably the best theology you can put in your hands. It is clear air or high peaked reformational thinking. In fact, for three years in Dallas, 4 business men and I met for breakfast and worked our way through the first 736 pages of his writing. They were all from Bible churches, but admitted to not knowing much of theology. So they would read during the week and we would meet to discuss what they read. The thing that amazed them first was how saturated with scriptural references Calvin’s writing is.

Paul prays that we know God. The best way to know God is to read what He has written! I find that we need to encourage one another to Bible reading and prayer. God has not left us to our own devices. He has spoken. He has revealed himself in the Living Word, Jesus, and in his inspired Word, the Bible. We, as believers, must grow in His knowledge. The more we grow in His knowledge as one is made new in his image, the better we will know ourselves.

Secondly, that we would know the hope to which he has called us. In order to know the Father of glory and be able to walk worthy of the calling, We must know that we have a high calling, Phil. 3:14; a holy calling, II Tim. 1:9; and a heavenly calling, Heb. 3:1. Paul tells the church at Philippi that he presses on toward the goal of the upward call, that is a high calling. Paul tells Timothy we have been called to a holy calling and Paul tells the Jewish Christians in Hebrews 3 that we share a heavenly calling. The term for church, ekklesia, literally means called out ones. Many people say, “Well, I haven’t been called to be a missionary,” or, “I haven’t been called to be a preacher.” Whatever your work is in the Kingdom, because there is no such thing as retirement in the Kingdom. Whatever he call you to be, he equips you to do. We have a concrete hope. We have a certain hope. We have a promised hope. It is concrete, certain, and promised because the one who called us in faithful and true and keeps his word!

Paul also prays in this prayer that they would know the riches of our inheritance in the saints. This passage lends itself to two interpretations. He says, “the riches of our inheritance in the saints.” He is talking about you. One interpretation is that our inheritance in Christ but His inheritance in us. We are part of God’s wealth! Later he says in Ephesians 4, he gave gifts to the church and he names people, positions. This is God’s wealth! The other interpretation is the inheritance that we receive because of being in Christ. There is scripture for both. The first says in Deut. 32:9, “The Lord’s position in his people.” and Peter says, “We are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation” (1 Pet. 2:9). The other view would use Paul when he says, “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things God has prepared for them that love him” (1 Cor. 2:9).

In 1916, Hetty Green died and left an estate worth over 100 million dollars. Hetty was known as America’s Greatest Miser. She ate cold oatmeal because it cost too much to heat it. Her son’s leg was amputated because she delayed too long looking for a free clinic.

We have the wealth of eternal life. We have the privilege of having been forgiven. We have the luxury of being clean. We have the greatest, most expensive education in possessing the wisdom of God who gives generously and without reproach. We have the bond of going to heaven. We are clothed better than Brooks Brothers, Oak Hall, or Joseph A. Banks. We are clothed in righteousness. We have the greatest vehicle of transport in that Jesus says he will come and take us to be with Himself. No need of a celestial SUV, no need of a car payment, no need of a taxi or UBER. He will take us to be with himself (John 14). The fourth is that we would know the power of the Father of glory. Notice, the greatness of his power toward us. This greatness is toward us. This power is in us. It is God’s power in us-God’s power toward us. It is God’s salvation for us-God’s Holy Spirit in us. “I am not ashamed of the gospel. It is the power of God unto salvation” (Romans ) “Our gospel came to you, not only in word, but in power and in the Holy Spirit and in assurance.” (1 Thess. 1:5) We are a new creation. He made alive, who were dead.” (Eph. 2:1) Then in verse four is says that God, even when were were dead, made us alive. That’s power. We were dead in trespasses and sins. I went to a friend’s funeral whose father had died. He differentiated between all the world’s religion with two words: do and done. All the world’s religions ask what can you do to earn salvation. Christianity is all about what Christ has done.

The God of the universe, who flung the farthest stars, who begins the babies’ heartbeats, who spins the tornado, who pushes the hurricane, who sets in motion soft snow, and burns the summer days with clear sun and Memphis humidity, that is the God of power. The greatness of his power. It is immeasurable greatness. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels-to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us.” (II Cor. 4:7) And notice, that not only does he give us Paul’s prayerful, knowing thanksgiving, he also gives us Paul’s prayerful, eternal perspective.This is the transition. He says that they would know he was raised and that he rules. This is the power that applies to you as well. Notice what he says in verse 20, “that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church.” This Tuesday I will be doing a funeral for a family member of one of your church members. I met with the family this week. It was a difficult situation. I am praying a great deal about this particular service. But I saw when meeting with the family members, the power of God, because of the hope of heaven. I saw in the eyes of the two sons the power of God to change and transform a life. Both sons are living to God’s glory, being used mightily by God, in spite of the fact of their father’s illness. On Friday, a friend dropped by my office unexpectedly. He’s a Roman Catholic. We visited about books and about reading, and then in the process of leaving, in a Colombo way, he stopped and turned. He said, “I wanted to thank you for doing my mother’s funeral. She’s definitely in heaven.” That is transformative. A man who lost his mother--well he didn’t really lose her did he? I wish we could remove that word from our funeral lexicon. If you know where someone has gone, and they are going to heaven, you haven’t lost them, have you? It’s a loss, but we haven’t lost them. My friend had the assurance of where his mother is because of the truth we are reading right now because Jesus was raised and Jesus rules. He says we too will be raised and we too will rule. It changes everything about our lives with a sense of joy and a sense of confidence. Are you praying to know him? Are you thankful in your prayers? I hope you walk out of here with a sense of joy that you are heaven-bound, that you are going to be with him.

I saw a Facebook post that someone wrote that said they were down and discouraged. They were asking for advice on stress-relievers. I didn’t want to comment or get involved, but I thought, why doesn’t this person just list the blessings. Have you ever done that? Just list the thing for which you are thankful? Try to write down 30 things for which you are thankful. Acknowledge the names of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. You will be fired up. I think I’ve told you before that I love this country. We are in a mess, but I don’t wring my hands because God does not read time. He reads eternity. God does not wring his hands. He is not worried about this nation, because he reigns and rules. Yes, we should read, and we should vote, and we should be informed, and we should know all of the issues. If you are worried, you are not giving it all to the Lord. Are you with me? If you are worried and stressed about anything, you are forgetting that he reigns and rules. Do you trust that? If you do then no issue can come in between you and your confidence that he reigns and rules. Notice in the closing, “And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him.” I pray that you would know him. I pray that you would know the riches in him. I pray that you would become aware of the power that is you through the person of the Holy Spirit. I pray that you would be reminded that he is raised and that he rules. To God be the glory.

Heavenly Father, thank you for Paul’s persistence in praying. He was so thankful for their faith and love even as I am thankful for Woodland’s faith and love. He had these four petitions: that they would know him, that they would know the hope, that they would know the power, and finally that they would be aware that you were raised and you reign and rule. Give us the peace that passes all understanding because you are the Father of glory. Amen.